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Statement submitted by World Youth Alliance, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

World Youth Alliance is a global coalition of young people dedicated to the promotion and protection of human dignity and building solidarity between young people of developing and developed countries.

We affirm that all human beings are equal in dignity and therefore deserve respect, opportunity, and the freedom to use their abilities and talents. Access to public services like education and health, along with respect for women's unique capacities and gifts, are essential to ensure equality and empowerment of women in all aspects of their lives. This is essential in combating systems and practices that limit women and girls' ability to fully participate in society, reducing poverty rates, undernourishment that affects overall health and unemployment in the society.

Education, a key public service has instrumental and intrinsic value for individuals and societies. It provides individuals in society with essential knowledge necessary for development. Education promotes gender and class equality by creating job opportunities among men and women. Education also provides a foundation for improved standards of living and greater earning potential, generates skilled personnel for industry and economic growth, better access to other services, and better health-care systems that are crucial for women and girls' welfare.

Education that fosters personal development provides a strong basis for personal and professional achievement. Teaching children about the dignity of the human person will help build a generation of women and men who recognize women and girls' intrinsic value and gifts.

World Youth Alliance has developed a curriculum that promotes respect, responsible behaviour, and equality between women and men. The Human Dignity Curriculum teaches children about human dignity: that every human being has it and should therefore be respected. The program is culturally sensitive and encourages parental involvement. Students who understand human dignity are prepared to make responsible personal decisions and to contribute to their communities and to treat others with respect in their families, peer groups, and communities, including in their personal relationships.

The Human Dignity Curriculum also has a sexuality education extension which teaches age-appropriate, biologically accurate information. It focuses on personal development and informed decisions related to students' sexuality based on an understanding of themselves, and with respect for their own human dignity and the dignity of others. This can help girls and boys form healthy, respectful relationships and resist peer pressure, thus decreasing social risk taking. It promotes gender equality among men and women, for both are born free and equal in dignity.

Women play a central role in their families and societies. Women and girls have equal capacities with men and boys to learn, create, and innovate. They also possess the unique capability to become pregnant and have children. Many, particularly in developing countries, do so without adequate information and medical support, which leads to approximately 800 maternal deaths each day. Each one is both emotionally devastating to loved ones and represents a loss to the community of the woman's creativity, talents, and productivity.

The maternal health of women and girls during pregnancy is vital to her overall health and well-being. During pregnancy, women's immune systems are depressed and women are susceptible to preventable cases of maternal death such as sepsis, haemorrhage, hypertension, and obstructed labour. To address these, women must have access to maternal health care, including prenatal and post-natal health care and emergency obstetric care, key elements of public services for health. The most

efficient way to do this is to ensure increase the number of skilled birth attendants. UNFPA states that three-fourths of all maternal deaths could be averted by the presence of skilled birth attendants Furthermore, better infrastructure, more hospitals and cleaner health-care facilities will reduce maternal mortality. This will save many women's lives, ensuring that they can play an essential part in the development of their communities. Practices such as abortion violate the dignity of mother and child and fail to address the root causes of maternal mortality and therefore should not be promoted as part of public services.

In order to address women's health needs we should also prioritize research and health care for non-communicable diseases, which are among the leading causes of death for women. One particular area of non-communicable disease that has been under-researched is reproductive health.

The endocrine system is closely linked to women's overall health, yet many women do not know what a healthy cycle looks like or when they need medical assistance. Moreover, many doctors cannot accurately diagnose these conditions or go beyond symptom management to treat the root causes. Many women experience symptoms on a regular basis but do not understand that they could benefit from treatment. Some of these symptoms can significantly impact women's enjoyment of their lives and ability to achieve their goals.

Women's knowledge about their health plays an important role in their empowerment. When a woman understands her cycle, she gains a window into her overall health. Knowledge empowers like nothing else can; it makes women informed participants in their health care able to make informed choices about reproductive health goals, achieve desired family size, and meet other long-term health goals. Knowledge-based health care will therefore help to empower women and girls in the society in achieving their goals and contribute to their society, economy and drive improvements in health-care infrastructure.

Sustainable Development Goals 6 and 10 stress the importance of gender equality and reduction of inequalities in society. Equal access to resources and capital by both men and women are crucial to societal and economic development. Both men and women are part of the society and as such, both must be included in all social and economic spheres of their communities.

Women have contributed to society both socially and economically throughout history, although their contributions have not always received recognition. These include both formal employment and unpaid care work, through such activities as educators and caregivers in the home, as participants in family businesses, and as workers and entrepreneurs in a variety of fields. In much of history, and in many places around the world today, women have lacked equal access to key forms of capital which enable success. When we ensure that women and girls have the same opportunities and access as men and boys, in all spheres of life, we empower them to drive their own success and active contributors to development in their communities. By promoting policies which value all of women's and girls' gifts and unique capacities, we enable them to be drivers of development in their communities.

There are seven forms of capital people need access to: natural endowments such as location, subsoil assets, forests, beaches, and climate; the financial resources of a nation, such as savings and international reserves; humanly made capital, such as buildings, bridges, roads, and telecommunications assets; institutional capital, such as legal protections of tangible and intangible property, efficient government departments, and firms that maximize value to shareholders and compensate and train workers; knowledge resources, such as international patents, and university and think tank capacities; human capital, which represents skills, insights and capabilities; and culture capital, which means not only the explicit articulations of culture like music,

language, and ritualistic tradition, but also attitudes and values that are linked to innovation.

Public services and social protection systems empower women and girls the most when they ensure they have the tools they need to use their abilities in the ways they want to. Women and girls who are healthy and educated can only go so far if they lack, due to law or practice, the ability to access the resources of their society. When we create equal access to the various forms of capital and ensure women and girls have the tools they need to use it, we are equipping the next generation of female scientists, inventors, entrepreneurs, business owners, and social innovators.

World Youth Alliance stresses that efforts should focus on promoting education and health for all, for we all have equal dignity. We recognize that health and education foster human creativity and ingenuity, facilitating gender equality and empowerment grounded in the dignity of the human person. When women have equal access to all forms of capital as men and boys in order to ensure authentic development.

World Youth Alliance calls upon the Commission to promote social protection schemes, access to public services, and sustainable infrastructure that is grounded in human dignity in order to achieve gender equality, empowerment of women and girls, and authentic development.